

Rev 6:9-11 (NIV)

- 1) As a result of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse ridding off, we have a time of peace, war, famine, and death – the Tribulation has begun!
- 2) The Lamb now breaks the fifth seal.
- 3) It reveals an altar in heaven, under which are the souls of all who had been martyred for faithfully proclaiming the word of God.
- 4) They had been killed for standing up for Christ and for his word.
- 5) There are some differences of opinion about the altar.
 - a) Some think the altar John saw is most likely emblematic of the altar of incense in the Old Testament (Ex 40:5), because of the association of incense with prayer.
 - b) Others think altar represents the altar of sacrifice in the Temple, where animals would be sacrificed to atone for sins.
 - i) In this case, instead of the animals' blood at the base of the altar, John saw the souls of martyrs who had died for preaching the gospel.
- 6) The word for "souls" (psyche) refers to the persons or to their lives.
- 7) These martyrs were told that still more would lose their lives for believing in Christ
- 8) We will see this come true in several places as we continue our study:

Rev 13:15 (NIV)

Rev 18:24 (NIV)

Rev 20:4 (NIV)

In the face of persecution and trials even to the point of death, Christians need to stand firmly for what they believe.

- 9) Only those who endure to the end will be rewarded by God (Rev 14:12; Mark 13:13).
- 10) These martyrs stand out because they were faithful.
 - a) Jesus had predicted (Matt 10:22) that his followers would be severely persecuted by those who hated what he stood for.
- 11) In times of terrible persecutions, however, they could have hope, knowing that salvation was theirs.
- 12) Standing firm to the end is not a way to be saved! It is the evidence that a person is really committed to Jesus.
- 13) Persistence is not a means to earn salvation; it is the by-product of a truly devoted life.
- 14) When we are pressured to give up and turn our backs on Christ, we must stand firm!

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15) T. S. Eliot said:

The greatest proof of Christianity for others is not how far a man can logically analyze his reasons for believing, but how far in practice he will stake his life on his belief.

16) The souls of the martyrs beneath the altar were calling out for justice for their deaths, asking God how long it would be before he would judge the earth and avenge their blood.

17) These words may sound harsh when used in prayer, but the martyrs were calling for God's justice, and they were leaving the vengeance to God – “how long until **you** avenge our blood.”

18) God promises to help the persecuted and to bring judgment on unrepentant sinners.

19) This was not revenge that they would carry out on their enemies but an appeal for God to punish **his** enemies.

20) Those who had killed these believers had mocked God by harming his witnesses.

21) The martyrs were told to rest a little longer until the full number of the servants of Jesus had been martyred.

22) God is not waiting until a certain number are killed; rather, he is waiting for the appointed time to arrive.

a) The statement simply says God knows the total number who will die for Christ.

23) He promises, however, that those who suffer and die for their faith will not be forgotten.

24) In fact, they will be rewarded and honored by God.

25) Today, oppressed people may wish for justice immediately, as these martyrs did, but they must be patient.

a) God works according to his own timetable, in keeping His promises to act.

b) No suffering for the sake of God's kingdom is wasted.

26) God will vindicate his people, but he will do it in his time, not ours.

27) The white robe that each martyr was given, as throughout the book of Revelation, symbolizes purity (see also Rev 3:4 and 7:11).

28) The martyred witnesses had prayed for God's justice.

29) Yet God's answer to them was to wait.

a) For a person of faith, it is good when God answers our prayers with a "Wait" or a "No."

30) Too often, people think that the only satisfactory answer to prayer is an immediate and thunderous "Yes!"

31) That is not biblical faith – God shows his great love when he says no or wait because he knows best and is sovereign.

32) Remember that God loves us and that his answers may not be what we expect.

a) Trust him and pray for strength to endure.

Rev 6:12-14 (NIV)

- 1) Worldwide Catastrophe!
 - a) A Massive earthquake beyond anything ever seen or felt before.
 - b) The Sun turns black like sackcloth and the moon is turns blood red.
 - i) The sun and moon are most likely blocked by smoke and ash from all the volcanic activity resulting from the massive earthquake.
 - c) Stars falling from the sky like figs
 - i) Obviously not literal since there are no stars that are smaller than the earth.
 - (1) smallest ever measured is about 20% larger than Jupiter which is 11 time as wide as earth.
 - ii) Must be a massive meteor shower with many meteors hitting the earth.
 - d) The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up.
 - i) Here again, we need to deal with the different ways of looking at the seals, trumpets, and bowls.
 - (1) If we interpret the events as chronological, **we must** consider this to be the end of the first round of judgments.
 - (2) If our interpretation is cyclical, or as showing progressive (varying intensity) with all the judgments ending at the return of Christ, **we will** see the rolling up of the sky as the time when Christ opens heaven and returns to earth (Rev 19:11).
 - ii) John MacArthur's comment here is that this is the human perception of the magnitude of this judgment, but is not the final dissolving of heaven which comes later (Rev 21:1)
 - e) Every mountain and island was removed from its place.
 - i) One theory here would be that the earthquake is so severe that the tectonic plates will actually override each other and as a result, massive amounts of land will be subducted into the earth's core.
 - ii) Without regard to theory, God will make them disappear or move them from where they are to other locations!
- 2) We cannot say precisely what is being denoted here in the dramatic depictions that John is laying out.
- 3) What we can say is that he is describing the terror of an unrepentant world.
- 4) As we see next, everyone from the greatest king to the lowest slave will make futile attempts to escape God's punishment.

Rev 6:15-17 (NIV)

- 5) Everyone fears the pending wrath of God once they see it start to unfold!
- 6) These folks are calling on the wrong thing.

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- 7) They obviously know the source of the destruction – God (him who sits on the throne) and Christ (the Lamb).
- 8) But, instead of calling on God to forgive them and being repentant of the sin they all have, they call on the mountains (which are being displaced) to cover them.
- 9) There was a commercial before Halloween that showed a group of young people who were frightened in a spooky setting.
- 10) They start suggesting places to hide and wind up hiding behind a curtain of chainsaws with the chainsaw murderer looking perplexed in the background.
- 11) Calling on the rocks and mountains to protect us when they are being destroyed and moved by God is much the same thing.
- 12) The last phrase of this chapter has a slightly different phraseology than many others:
For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"
- 13) Young's Literal has it
because come did the great day of His anger, and who is able to stand?
- 14) The idea here must be that the wrath of the God head against sinners is something that no one can stand up to.
- 15) No such thing as playing thru the pain in this case.

- 1) We now enter a break between the sixth and seventh (last seal)
- 2) Just when destruction seemed sure, four angels held back the four winds of judgment until God's people were sealed as his own.
- 3) This sealing occurs in this interlude between the sixth and seventh seals.
- 4) An interlude also comes between the sixth and seventh trumpets (10:1-11:13) but not between the sixth and seventh bowls (16:12-21).

Rev 7:1-3 (NIV)

- 5) The opening phrase of verse 1, "after this" and also the phrase "after these things", where it is used is usually followed by some form of the verb eidon meaning "to see".
- 6) This combination is used several times in Revelation to introduce a new vision.
- 7) The use of after this in this passage signifies that the vision of the sixth seal has ended and John is about to see a new vision.
- 8) It may also indicate that this new vision depicts events that come after the sixth seal chronologically.
- 9) The scene now shifts from judgment on the ungodly to special protection for the godly.
- 10) As the vision unfolds, John first sees four angels.
- 11) These four are given power over the elements of nature.

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- 12) They are seen standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth.
- 13) The phrase actually refers to the whole earth by designating the four primary points on the compass.
- 14) The sudden silence and the angels holding back the four winds from blowing upon the earth picture God's protection from harm.
- 15) Holding back is from *krateō*, a strong word that suggests that the winds are struggling to break free from their restraint.
- 16) They contrast the peace and security of the believers with the terror of those hiding in the rocks.
- 17) The winds described here picture harmful winds as agents of God bringing destruction.
- 18) The four angels hold back the winds so that not a leaf rustled in the trees, and the sea became calm.
- 19) The angelic restraining of the wind also symbolizes the withholding of the plagues associated with the imminent trumpet judgments.
- 20) So the next phase of God's wrath is restrained for the moment. Verse 3 tells us...
3 "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."
- 21) The winds of judgment are gathering force, soon to be released.

Rev 7:4-8 (NIV)

- 1) Purely as a starting point, what are things you have come to understand about the 144,000?
- 2) Things these 144,000 are not:
 - a) Not the church.
 - b) Not the only Jews that will be saved.
 - c) Not the only people who will be saved.
- 3) Truth is, this is one of those texts that absolutely screams context.
- 4) The context in this case being another passage in Revelation which further explains these being sealed.

Rev 14:1-5 (NIV)

- 5) The specificity of the list says that it is the actual tribes that are being considered.
- 6) MacArthur breaks the list down as follows:
 - a) Although Reuben was the firstborn (Gen 46:8), Judah is listed first.
 - i) Reuben forfeited his birthright as punishment for his sexual misconduct with his father's concubine (1 Chron 5:1).

- b) The omission of the tribe of Dan in favor of the priestly tribe of Levi is also unusual.
- c) Dan was evidently omitted due to the tribe's penchant for idolatry (cf. Deut 29:18-21) — which was even worse than that of the rest of the nation (cf. Judg 18; Amos 8:14).
 - i) While Dan will share in the millennial blessings (Ezek 48:1-2,32) the tribe will not be selected for this duty nor protected during the Tribulation.
- d) Similarly, the name of Ephraim is omitted in favor of his father Joseph because Ephraim defected from the ruling house of Judah (Isa 7:17).
 - i) Also Ephraim, like Dan, was consumed with idolatry (Hos 4:17). His brother Manasseh is included because he was the faithful son of Joseph.

7) He goes on to comment:

This critical passage reinforces the biblical truth that God is not through with the nation of Israel (cf. Rom. 9-11). Though Israel failed in its mission to be a witness nation in the Old Testament, that will not be the case in the future. From the Jewish people will come the greatest missionary force the world has ever known. The result of their effort will be a redeemed Israel, as promised by God, and innumerable redeemed Gentiles.

- 8) Bottom line is, Revelation Jewish believers and evangelists are the first fruits of Israel, which as a nation will be redeemed before Christ returns (Zech 12:10-13:1,8-9; Rom 11:26).
- 9) The 144,000 are not all the Jewish believers at that time, but a unique group selected to proclaim the gospel in that day (cf. 12:17; 14:1-5).
- 10) This squarely addresses the comments we will read next regarding the multitude of believers.